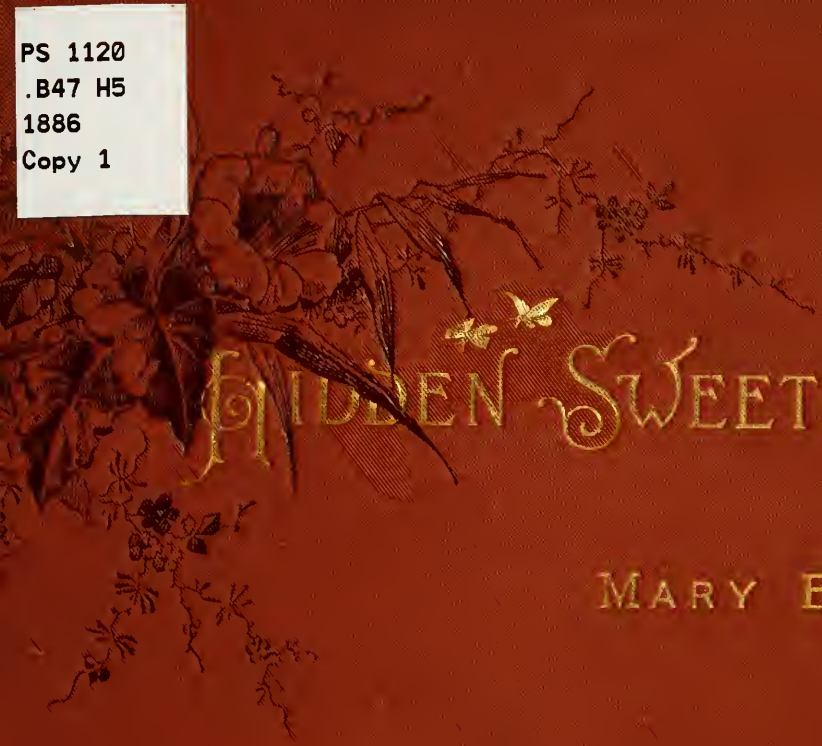
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HIDDEN SWEETNESS

MARY BRADLEY

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HIDDEN SWEETNESS.

"Oh, when shall it be fully granted me to see how sweet Thou art, my Lord God!" — THOMAS À KEMPIS.

The Poems

BY MARY BRADLEY.

The Illustrations

FROM DRAWINGS BY DOROTHY HOLROYD.

BOSTON:
ROBERTS BROTHERS.
1886.

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University Press:
John Wilson and Son, Cambridge.



Behold! I show you a mystery. — 1 *Cor.* xv. 51.

TO

ALICE, IN HEAVEN.



"Hast thou forgot
The love wherewith we loved of old?"

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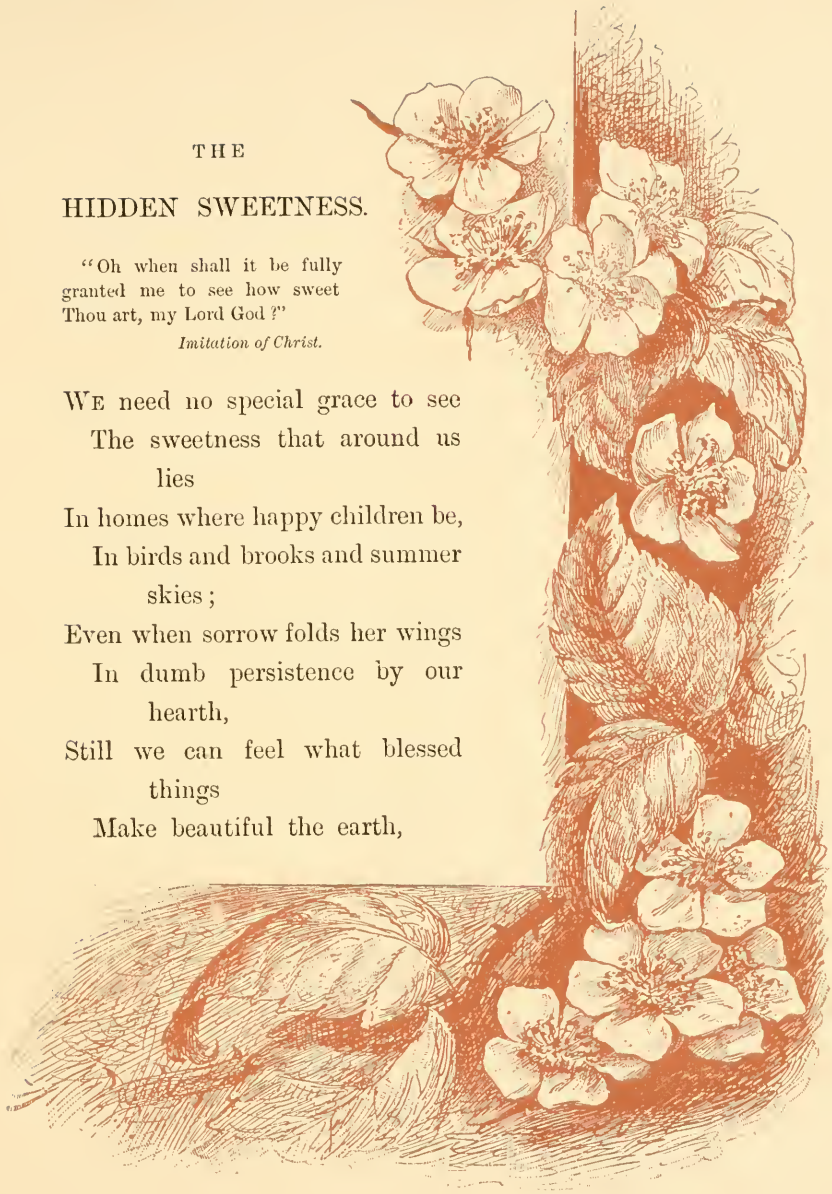
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THE

HIDDEN SWEETNESS.

"Oh when shall it be fully granted me to see how sweet Thou art, my Lord God?"

Imitation of Christ.

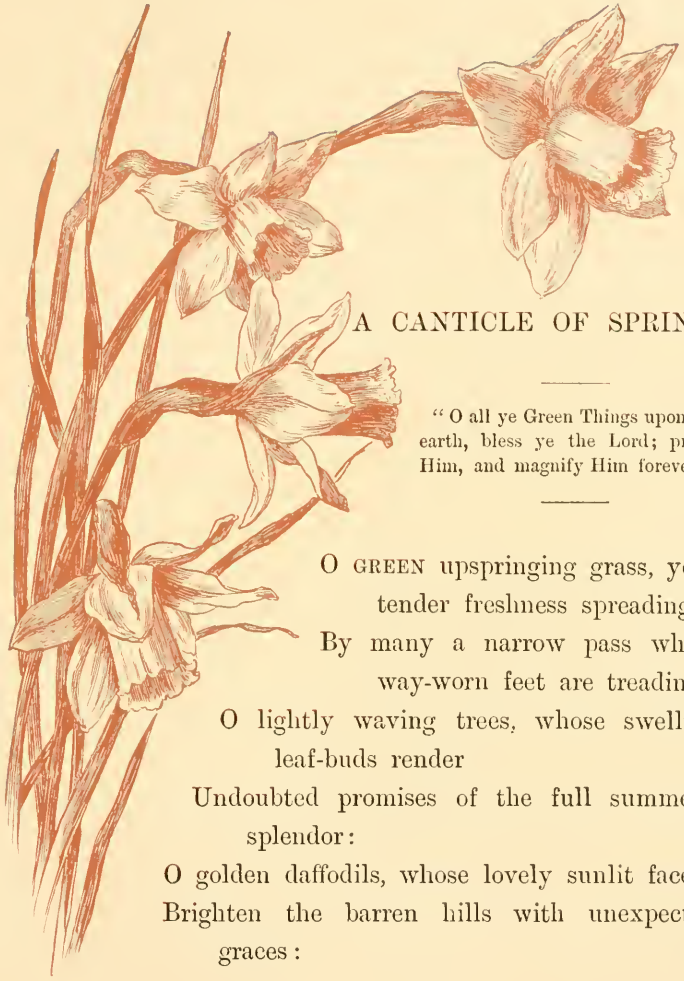


We need no special grace to see
The sweetness that around us lies
In homes where happy children be,
In birds and brooks and summer skies;
Even when sorrow folds her wings
In dumb persistence by our hearth,
Still we can feel what blessed things
Make beautiful the earth,

And thrill responsive to the sense
Of every lovely influence.

But ah! how faintly we are stirred
 By things divine, whose voices seem
As ineffectually heard
 As voices in a dream!
We praise Thee with our lips, and yet
 The while we cry, "How sweet Thou art!"
It is as though a seal were set
 Upon our eyes and heart.
The sweetness that we might possess
We see not, and we feel still less.

Lord, unto whom our dull desires
 Are known, and every hindering sin,
Kindle anew the fervent fires
 That ought to glow our souls within;
The sorrowful days are here again
 When Thou wert in the lonesome wild,
In prayer, in fasting, and in pain
 For us unreconciled.
Give to us now, O Christ, to see
How wholly sweet thy love can be!



A CANTICLE OF SPRING.

"O all ye Green Things upon the earth, bless ye the Lord; praise Him, and magnify Him forever!"

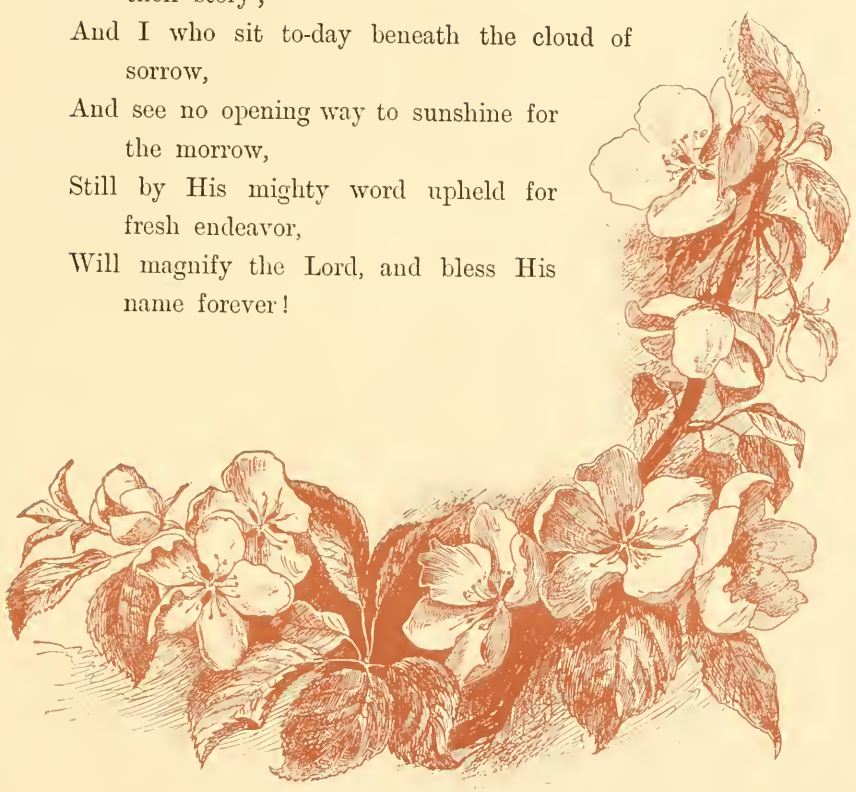
O GREEN upspringing grass, your tender freshness spreading
By many a narrow pass where way-worn feet are treading:
O lightly waving trees, whose swelling leaf-buds render
Undoubted promises of the full summer's splendor:
O golden daffodils, whose lovely sunlit faces
Brighten the barren hills with unexpected graces:

O all ye blossoms set the woods and meadows over,
Windflower and violet, and columbine and clover,—
Bless ye the Lord on high, by field and fell and river,
Praise Him and magnify His holy name forever!

Now when the budding spring escapes from winter's durance,
Hope hath its flowering, and faith its sweet assurance:
How shall our hearts be sad when Nature's face rejoices,
And earth and air are glad with her tumultuous voices?
Ears that His message seek and doubt not in possessing,
To them the winds shall speak in undertones of blessing;
And to the seeing eyes His wondrous works beholding,
No little bird that flies, no small green thing unfolding,
But doth His love express who shall our souls deliver,
Whose holy name we bless and magnify forever!

Praise Him, O soul of mine, nor ever cease from praising,
Though olive-tree and vine be blighted in the raising;
Though flood and frost and fire assail me in one morning,
And though my heart's desire shall perish without warning!

Still shall His rivers flow, the heavens declare His glory,
Still shall His green things grow, the winds repeat their story;
And I who sit to-day beneath the cloud of sorrow,
And see no opening way to sunshine for the morrow,
Still by His mighty word upheld for fresh endeavor,
Will magnify the Lord, and bless His name forever!





"MY TIMES ARE IN THY HAND."

I NEED not care
If days to come be dark or fair,
If the sweet summer brings delight
Or bitter winter chills the air.

No thought of mine
Can penetrate the deep design,
That forms afar, through bud and bloom,
The purple clusters of the vine.

I do not know
The subtle secret of the snow,
That hides away the violets
Till April teaches them to blow.

Enough for me
Their tender loveliness to see,
Assured that little things and large
Fulfil God's purpose equally.

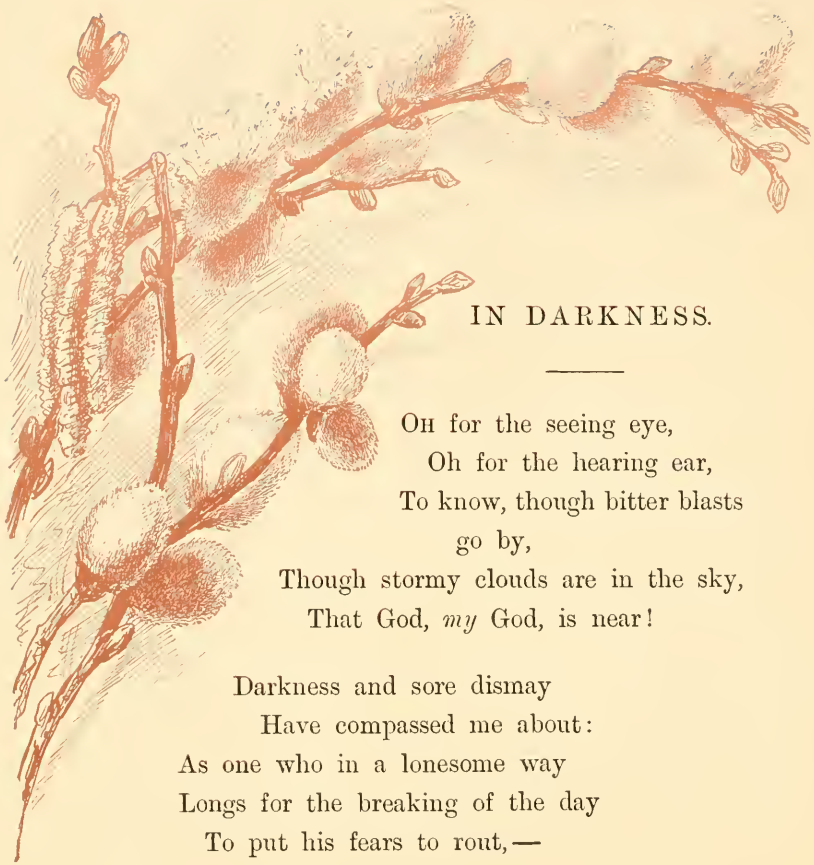
How this is planned,
Or that, I may not understand:
I am content, my God, to know
That all my times are in Thy hand.

Whatever share
Of loss, or loneliness, or care
Falls to my lot, it cannot be
More than Thy will for me to bear.

And none the less,
Whatever sweet thing comes to bless
And gladden me, Thou art its source, —
The sender of my happiness.

Add this to me,
With other gracious gifts so free,
That I may never turn my face
In any evil hour from Thee;

Nor on the sand
Of shifting faith and feeling stand;
But wake and sleep with equal trust,
Knowing my times are in Thy hand.



IN DARKNESS.

Oh for the seeing eye,
Oh for the hearing ear,
To know, though bitter blasts go by,
Though stormy clouds are in the sky,
That God, *my* God, is near!

Darkness and sore dismay
Have compassed me about:
As one who in a lonesome way
Longs for the breaking of the day
To put his fears to rout,—

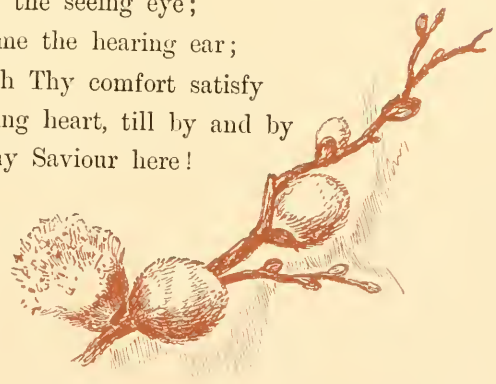
Yet knows that day, alas!
Will only show more plain
The rugged road he has to pass,
The frowning rocks, the black morass,
The danger and the pain,—

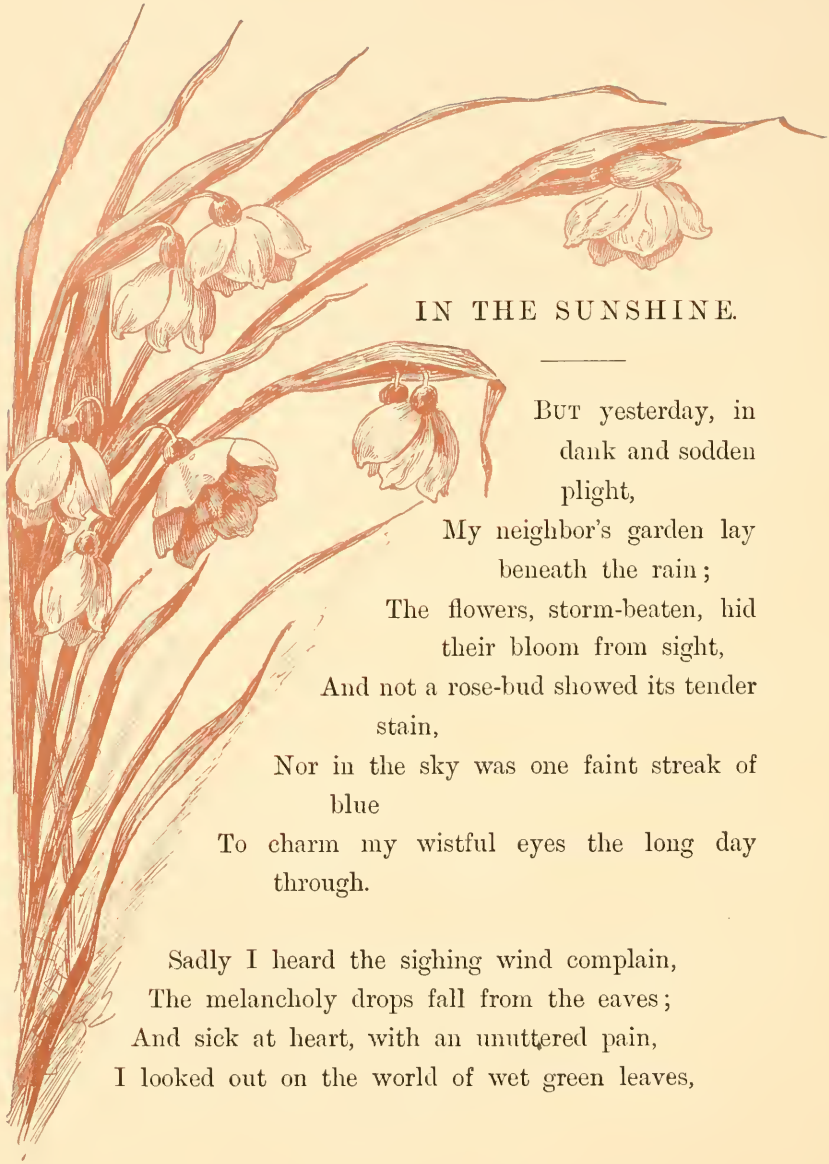
So I, from hour to hour,
A dreary path have trod:—
Oh, but to feel the quickening power
That in the sunshine or the shower,
Still draws me up to God!

Give me a little space,
Lord of my life, to see
The tender sweetness of Thy face;
And suffer in this darksome place
One gleam of light to be.

Sorrow and loss and pain
Have been my frequent share,
Yea, and will be my share again;
But shall I wring my hands in vain
For blank, unanswered prayer?

Give me the seeing eye;
Give me the hearing ear;
And with Thy comfort satisfy
The yearning heart, till by and by
I find my Saviour here!





IN THE SUNSHINE.

BUT yesterday, in dank and sodden plight,
My neighbor's garden lay beneath the rain;
The flowers, storm-beaten, hid their bloom from sight,
And not a rose-bud showed its tender stain,
Nor in the sky was one faint streak of blue
To charm my wistful eyes the long day through.

Sadly I heard the sighing wind complain,
The melancholy drops fall from the eaves;
And sick at heart, with an unuttered pain,
I looked out on the world of wet green leaves,

Longing for night to blot it all away,
And cheat me with sweet dreams of a new day.

But when night came I paced the lonesome room,
 Still with impatient murmurs on my tongue;
"O heart," I cried, "why should it be thy doom
 With such a sordid sorrow to be wrung;
And wherefore is it that for me and mine
Nor roses bloom, nor happy sunbeams shine?

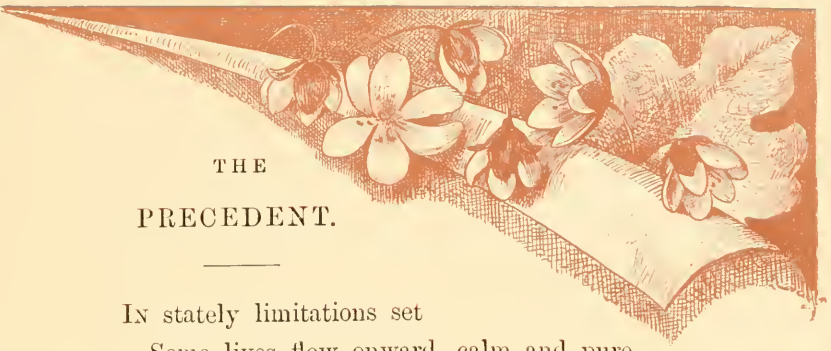
"Sweet may the dawning of a new day be;
 But what delight is it for one who goes
In shaded paths and flowerless, to see
 His neighbor's garden blossom like a rose?
No garden-ground is mine; no joy begun
Wakes to fulfilment with the rising sun."

To-day, as from my window's height I lean,
 To see my neighbor's roses far below,
I wonder how such envious thoughts and mean
 (That shame me now) found ever room to grow,—
So light of heart, so wholly glad am I
At the mere sight of God's fair earth and sky!

Only the same world it was yesterday,—
 The care, the grief, the burden, all remain;

Yet their dull discontent has slipped away;
The sun is shining where before was rain!
And in its wholesome light my heart's unrest
Turns into faith that all is for the best.

Since God hath willed that some shall dwell at ease,
And others shall know hardness, this is sure:
The lot that fits each nature He foresees,
And wherefore murmur when we must endure?
Some day His loving wisdom will be plain
As the sweet sunshine following after rain.



THE PRECEDENT.

In stately limitations set
Some lives flow onward, calm and pure,
While others all the strain and fret
Of shifting currents must endure.
They who against the cruel tide
Forever seem to toil in vain,
And with the sunshine close beside,
Stand in the shadow and the rain,—
What wonder if they bear their part
Sometimes with but a sorry heart?

The flesh is weak, and sore dismayed;
The spirit falters in its trust:
The One who seems so slow to aid—
Are all His dealings kind and just?
Is it a father's part to see
One child outside, forlornly cold,
The while he shelters tenderly
Another in his garment's fold?

"This is no loving father's care!"
They cry out, sullen with despair.

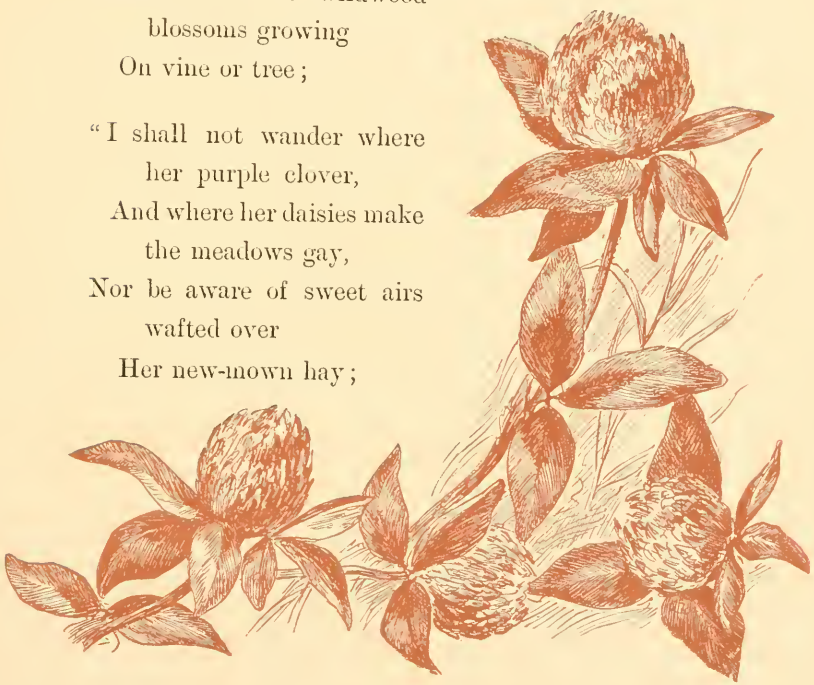
Who shall explain the weary ways
 So many patient feet have trod?
Or who account for the delays
 And dumb indifference of God?
Not I, indeed — I only know
 Christ had not where to lay his head;
He suffered hunger long ago,
 And pain, and grief uncomforted;
No creature lives and dies forlorn,
But Christ his utmost woe has borne.

And if the Father hid His face
 From him forsaken, cannot we
Abide in darkness for a space,
 Nor wring our hands impatiently?
"Touched with the feeling of our pain," —
 O tenderest Heart that ever beat!
Bend down to comfort us again, —
 The hearts that tremble at thy feet;
And let us find in thee indeed
Help for the saddest hour of need.

MY GRAPE-VINE.

SIGHING I said, when warm west winds were blowing,
"The gracious summer has no gifts for me;
I shall not see her wildwood
blossoms growing
On vine or tree;

"I shall not wander where
her purple clover,
And where her daisies make
the meadows gay,
Nor be aware of sweet airs
wafted over
Her new-mown hay;



"I shall not hear, for all my soul rejoices
In every cadence of the tender strain,
The mingled music of her many voices;
Its low refrain

"Of droning bees, and locusts sharply shrilling,
And brooks that murmur to their tuneful fall;
Nor yet the rapture of her bird-songs thrilling
High over all.

"I that delight in shadowy woodland places
The stony pavements of the town must tread,
And see the blue of heaven in measured spaces
Above my head.

"While all the summer's bloom and lavish beauty
Are spread afar for other eyes to see,
Shut in by city-walls the path of duty
Is marked for me."

I did not know — faint heart and unbelieving! —
The while I murmured at a needful thing,
What dear delight, to shame me for such grieving,
My vine would bring.

Betwixt the stones it had to grow and flourish, —
The stubborn stones that barely let it pass,
Nor left enough of garden-mould to nourish
One blade of grass.

Yet how it grew — so tall and fair and greenly!
And all its liberal leaves and clusters spread
In such luxuriance, one forgot how meanly
Its roots were fed.

Each wandering wind that made the young leaves shiver
Stirred tender odors, delicately sweet;
And when the July air was all a-quiver
With fervent heat,

What coolness lingered in my vine's embraces,
What lovely shadows wavered to and fro!
Making me dream of woods, and breezy places
Where wild-flowers grow.

All summer long, — until the lamentation
Of sad November stripped the branches bare, —
My grape-vine brought me gracious compensation
For many a care.

"Behold," it mutely said, "my green profusion,
Behold the ripening clusters where they hang,
And bear in mind the prison-house seclusion
From whence they sprang."

Now wintry winds around me are complaining,
And naked to the trellis clings the vine;
But its suggestions, comforting, sustaining,
Shall still be mine.

I may not have such blossoms fair for showing,
Or perfect fruit; but this at least I see, —
That narrow limits need not bar from growing
The vine — or me!



HIS ADVENT.

"The king is coming! strew the way
With branching palms and lily-flowers!
Let banners wave in proud array,
And mirth and music crowd the day
Through all its rosy hours."

So spake the people long ago;
But when indeed the King had come,
There was no rushing to and fro,
No trumpet-call or pompous show,
And every voice was dumb.

For lo, within a manger-bed
He lay, a little naked child;
No glory was about him shed
Save that above his crownless head
A virgin mother smiled.

What would the world of such a king?
Away with him! their high-priests cried;
Nor ceased until — ah, cruel thing! —
An eager crowd came hurrying
To see him crucified.

High-priest and populace did meet
With one accord their king to slay:
They pierced his hands; they nailed his feet;
There never was so sad and sweet
A sight before that day.

For he who hung upon the tree
With his last breath their sin forgave,
Even while they gibed him scornfully —
"Others he saved, forsooth, but see!
Himself he cannot save."

Ah, King divine! whose worth indeed
The world unworthy never knew, —
Dost Thou still live to intercede
For creatures blind to their own need,
Who know not what they do?

The wise and learned answer nay!
But babe and suckling let me be,
Content to know no more than they,
If so I can but find the way
O King, that leads to Thee!



THE SONG IN THE DARK.

I HEARD a little bird sing out one morning
While yet the darkness overspread the sky,
And not a single streak of rose gave warning
That day was nigh.

It sang with such a sweet and joyful clearness,
The silence piercing with a note so fine,
That I was thrilled with sudden sense of nearness
To Love divine.

"O weary heart" (it seemed to utter), "hearken!
God sends a message to you in my song:
The day is coming, though the shadows darken,
And night is long.

"God sees your eyelids heavy — not with slumber;
The sorrowful tears that make their brightness dim,
And all your patient prayers no man can number,
Are known to Him.

"The day shall come, your darkness dispossessing:"
And while the bird sang, on my eyelids prest
Soft weights of sleep, the weary brain caressing
To happy rest.

I slept as children sleep, tired out with crying, —
God knows, not I, when I had slept before!
I waked to find the blessed sunshine lying
Along the floor.

And in its gracious light to see returning
The face of one that was the world to me,
The face my heart with desolate grief and yearning
Had ached to see.

The day had come indeed! O sweetest singer,
The song you sung me in the dark was true,
And would that I could be as swift a bringer
Of joy to you!

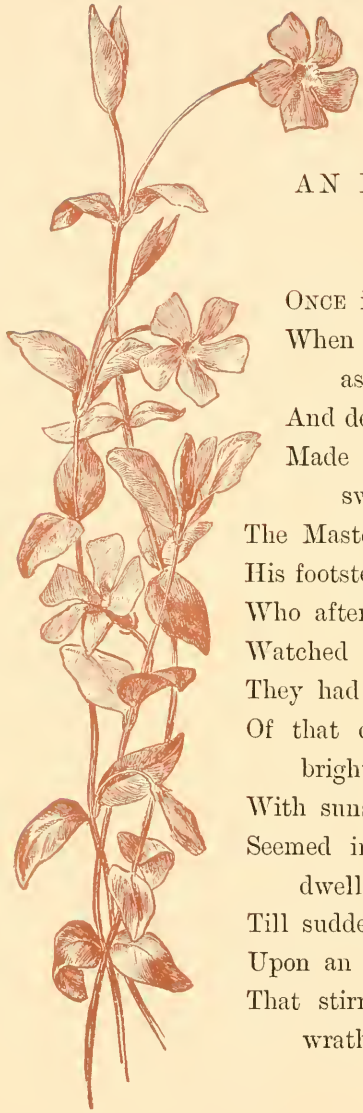
Your nest should rock in greenest branches, truly,
And there your shy brown mate and downy brood
Should chirp to you, and spread their winglets duly,
Nor lack for food.

No cruel sportsman ever should beset you,
No sudden tempest ever cause affright,
Nor any ill that birds are heir to, fret you
By day or night.

Vain wish, alas! and valueless completely;
For whether it was blackbird, wren, or lark,
Or silver-throated thrush that all so sweetly
Sang in the dark,—

I never knew. You never more came near me,
Yet surely I may leave you to *His* care
Whose tender pity sent your song to cheer me
In my despair.





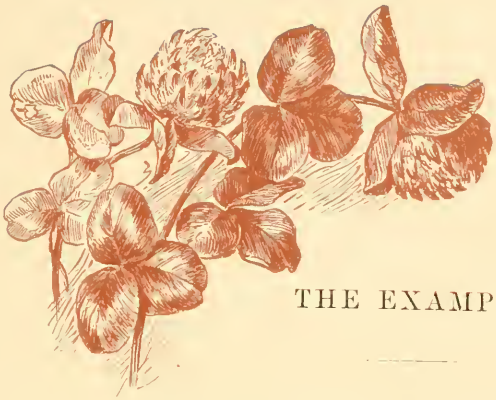
AN EASTERN STORY.

ONCE in the hush of eventide,
When daylight tasks were put aside,
And dew and coolness after heat
Made the sweet stillness doubly sweet,
The Master walked in Galilee;
His footsteps followed by those three
Who afterward on Olivet
Watched with Him in His agony.
They had no dread foreboding yet
Of that dark hour; the world was bright
With sunset splendor; and its light
Seemed in their peaceful hearts to dwell,—
Till suddenly a slant ray fell
Upon an object in their path
That stirred up quick, unreasoning wrath.

A dead dog, hideous in decay,
Mangled, and foul with blood and dust,
Prone in the trodden high-road lay —
A sight, indeed, to rouse disgust.
And the disciples, justified
By their offended senses, vied
Each with the other to express
Scorn of the creature's loathsomeness;
Nor, till at length the Master spake,
Were either of them moved to make
One little pitiful pause, wherein
Some kindlier utterance might have been.
He, listening, silent for a space,
Bent down to the disfigured head,
As one who seeks some hidden grace:
Then, with a calm, uplifted face,
And something in His sorrowful eyes
That caught their hearts up with surprise,
"Pearls are not half so white," He said,
"As the dog's teeth,"
And went His way.
Whereat the three in mute dismay
Glanced at each other. Sudden shame
Reddened their brows; and as a flame
Leaps to the wind, the kindling fire
Of penitence and swift desire

Leaped in their breasts with one accord,
And proved itself in deed, not word.
With willing hands that put aside
All the reluctance of their pride,
They dragged the dead dog from the mire
Wherein it lay, to a green place;
Where, with strewn leaves and branches rent
From the thick olives, its disgrace
They hid from future passers-by.
Then eagerly, with look askance
That dreaded, yet besought His glance,
They to their Lord again drew nigh,
To find His brief displeasure spent,
And in His gracious smile to meet
A recompense exceeding sweet.

Sweet is the hidden truth that lies
Too deep, perhaps, for careless eyes,
In the old story. For who knows —
Since a dog's teeth His praise could win —
What inward grace may be in those
Lost souls that out of reach of care,
Beyond our pity and our prayer,
Seem dead in trespasses and sin?



THE EXAMPLE.

HAPLY along life's weary ways,
 Thickset with uncongenial tasks,
Some overweighted toiler stays
 His hand from labor, while he asks:
"Wherefore shall I these burdens bear
That others ought, at least, to share?

"I, since the day's march was begun,
 Have spent my strength, nor turned aside
From any service to be done,
 Nor grudged my pleasures, self-denied;
Yea, I have even counted gain,
For the work's sake, my loss and pain.

"But now my soul is vexed; for why
 Should duty have no law for these

Who with averted looks pass by,
 Or sit with folded hands at ease?
Why should I suffer more than they
The heat and burden of the day?"

How many a spirit fretted sore
 With the world's cold indifference,
Has turned such questions o'er and o'er,
 Still haunted with the restless sense
Of doubt and wondering distrust:
Would these things be if God were just?

Ah me! the ways of God with men,
 No man that lives can find them out;
Who grasps at things beyond his ken,
 Is tossed on shoreless seas about.
Yet in the thickest of the night,
For eyes that see there shall be light.

What time we nurse our discontent—
 Rather, instead, should we recall
How once in servants' guise He went
 Who was the Master of us all;
Nor any work whereby was wrought
The Father's will, too irksome thought.

Need any be disquieted
 Whose hearts this memory enclose?
Who follows where the Lord hath led,
 What matter is it where he goes?
For working with Him side by side,
The meanest task is glorified.



COMFORTED.

THERE was a time when Grief with me
Kept close and tireless company:
A new and most unwelcome guest,
He sat beside me day and night,
And robbed my pillow of its rest,
And spoiled the sunshine of its light,
And filled the hours of night and day
With an unspeakable dismay.
I could not part with Grief, alas!
For he had "taken up the room"
Of one whose innocent fair face
Was hid in an untimely tomb.
Grief still "the absent child" expressed,
And did her winsome ways repeat,
And torture me with all the sweet
Lost loveliness I had possessed.

And so we two walked side by side —
No friends, indeed, but yet allied
In such wise that I could but choose
To let him fill my empty arms;
Wherefore all bright things that did use
To bring me pleasure, lost their charms.
The dawn rose red for me in vain,
And the soft patter of the rain
On April leaves, awoke no sense
Of its old gladsome influence.
There was no beauty in blue skies,
Or greening earth, for my dull eyes;
Though once, if but a little bird
Above its new-made nest should sing,
With sudden rapture I was stirred;
And the whole wonder of the spring
One purple violet could bring.

One night, with Grief, I closed my eyes,
And had no other thought but he
Would waken with me presently.
But God is gracious; God is wise
Beyond our knowledge. In the dim
Hushed hours betwixt the dark and light
There came a messenger from Him
That of my Grief bereft me quite.

I know not how to paint the sight
That blest my eyes, or make you see
The vision that was sent to me.
For oh! it was the child that came,
And called me softly by my name,
And clasped me with the little white
Warm hands that clung to me of old,
And nestled in my garment's fold.

A dream, you think? Well, may be so;
But none the less God's messenger;
For while I lay, — afraid to stir,
Lest the sweet dream should from me go, —
The child, that only uttered here
Such inarticulate trills and coos
As nestling birds and babies use,
Began to speak strange words and clear:
Strange words, but clear; which, should I try
To put in speech of mine again,
It would be effort spent in vain.
This was a language of the sky,
Which, just for once, I understood,
Because, my God, Thou wert so good,
And suffered one sad heart to see
How narrow-souled and dull we are,
That make our selfish love a bar
Betwixt these little ones and Thee.

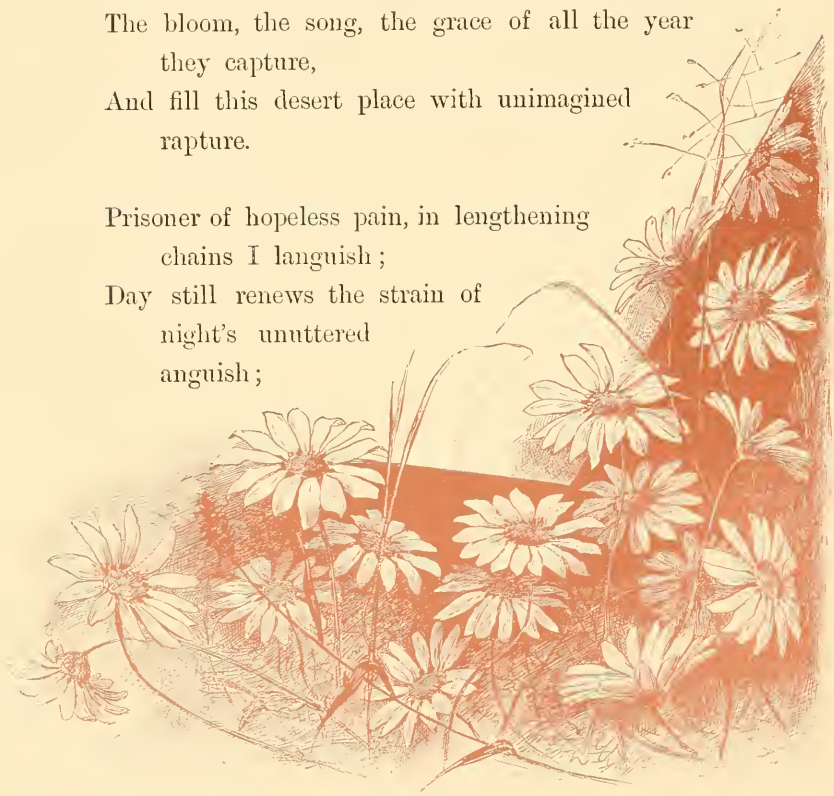
Whereat — though it was but a dream,
That vanished ere the east was red —
The one sad heart was comforted;
Nor since, do I and sorrow seem
So fitly mated as before.
For in my daily tasks once more
I find content. And little things, —
The wavering shadows on the wheat,
The scent of flowers, the whir of wings, —
Bring back a sense of something sweet.
As vague, as fair, as sweet as these,
The vision was that came to me,
Whose nameless charm the shadow is
Of something exquisite to be.
Ah! when in some unearthly sphere
Of perfect love and bliss complete,
The child and I once more shall meet,
How like a dream it will appear
That Grief and I were comrades here!



SUMMER WINDS.

Sweet are the summer days that come with tender
shining,
Sweet are the wandering winds that visit me repining;
The bloom, the song, the grace of all the year
they capture,
And fill this desert place with unimagined
rapture.

Prisoner of hopeless pain, in lengthening
chains I languish;
Day still renews the strain of
night's unuttered
anguish;



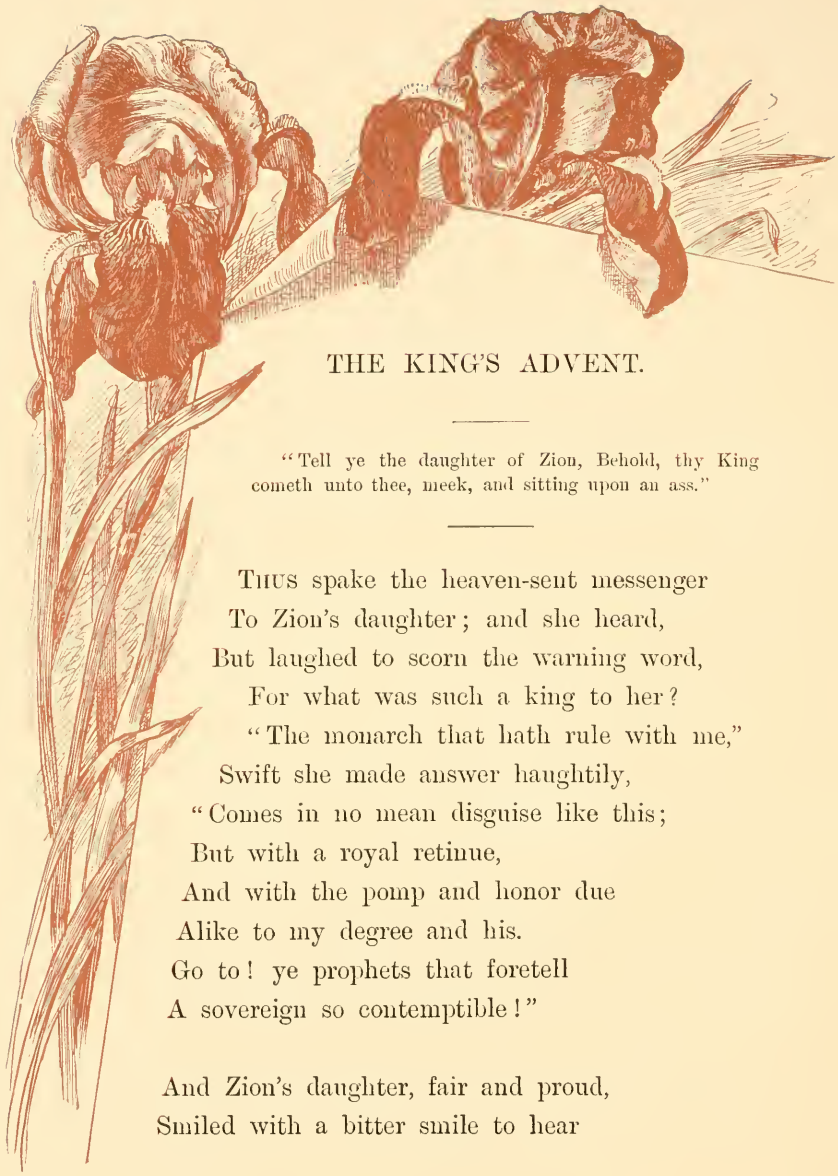
I lie beneath His rod, His bolts and bars surround me,
Yet the sweet winds of God with healing touch have found me.

O welcome wind that comes His gracious law fulfilling,
In you the brown bee hums, the sky-lark's song is thrilling;
Voices of wood and field your whispering voice discloses,
And in your breath revealed I find the summer's roses.

They have not lent their bloom to comfort me more nearly,
And in my silent room no bird has carolled cheerly;
Yet while your light caress, O wind of Heaven, woos me,
Nor rose nor singing bird its sweetness doth refuse me.

Blow through my fevered brain, soft breath, and cool its burning;
Speak, soothing voice, again, and hush the wild heart's yearning;
Though in the floods I stand, and deep waves overflow me,
Show me my Father's hand, His loving-kindness show me.

Truly I will not doubt that love shall yet avail me,
My fear I will cast out, nor let despair assail me:
Blow, summer winds, away the black cloud of repining,
My heart lies still to-day to feel the tender shining.



THE KING'S ADVENT.

"Tell ye the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass."

THUS spake the heaven-sent messenger
To Zion's daughter; and she heard,
But laughed to scorn the warning word,
For what was such a king to her?
"The monarch that hath rule with me,"
Swift she made answer haughtily,
"Comes in no mean disguise like this;
But with a royal retinue,
And with the pomp and honor due
Alike to my degree and his.
Go to! ye prophets that foretell
A sovereign so contemptible!"

And Zion's daughter, fair and proud,
Smiled with a bitter smile to hear

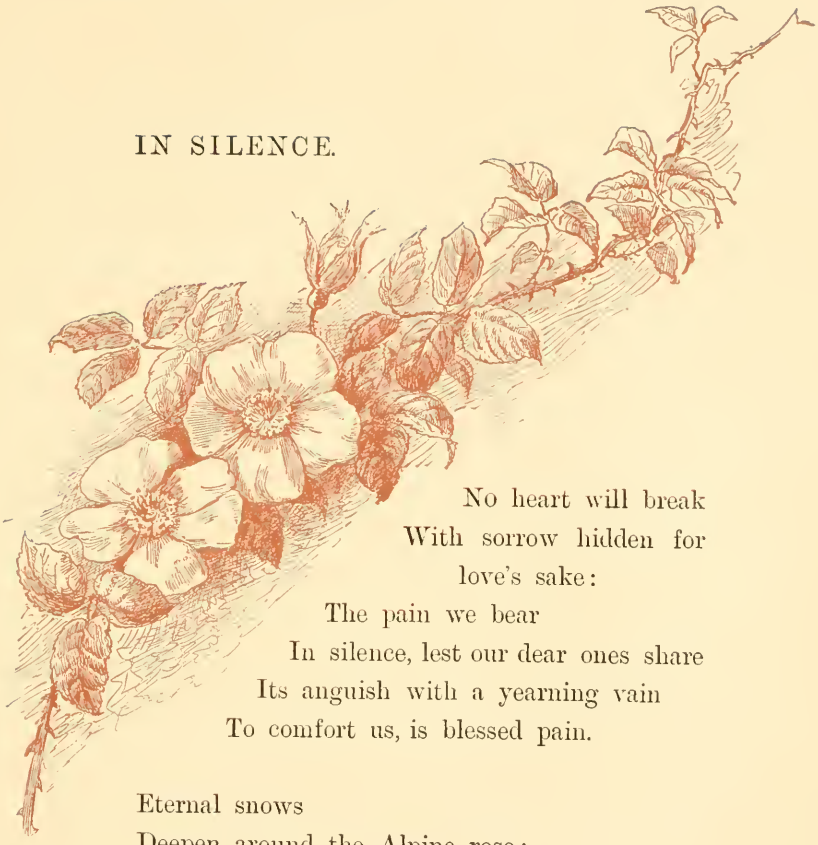
The ignorant tumult of the crowd
As the meek king foretold drew near.
"Fit monarch for a rabble rout,"
She spoke disdainful. "Let them shout
Hosannas now; full soon their cry
Will ring as loudly, Crucify!"

Came one amidst the gathering throng
Whose heart had suffered cruel wrong;
Whom want and woe had driven to sin,
Until the tale of life had been
For many an evil year the same
Dull round of wretchedness and shame.
Men gibed at her; and women drew
Their garments closer, lest the stain
Of some uncleanness might remain
From a chance touch. But pressing through,
Heedless of both, she reached His side,
And fell upon her knees, and cried,
"Art thou the King in truth? O King!
Have mercy on a wretched thing,
Too vile to venture any plea
Save its exceeding misery!"

Men scoffed at her despairing cries,
And women flashed their virtuous scorn

At the base creature, woman-born,
Who shamed their sex. But the King's eyes
Of all her woful plight took heed
With searching glance. Then tenderly,
"*I am* the King in truth," said He;
"And whoso cometh unto Me,
My grace shall answer to his need.
Go, and fear nothing."
And she went,
Lost in a strange and sweet content
That took no thought of day or night,
Or henceforth any murmurs spent
Upon their dearth of world's delight.
For joy exceeding all the rest
Was in her sense of peace possessed.
But Zion's daughter, proud and fair,
Still waits to see her king advance
With fitting pomp and circumstance
Of waving banners, and the blare
Of trumpets on the startled air;
Waits with a vain desire as yet;
While she whose bitter need was met
With His compassion, whose disgrace
Was blotted out with her despair,
Dwells in the sunshine of His face,
And knows the King came then and there.

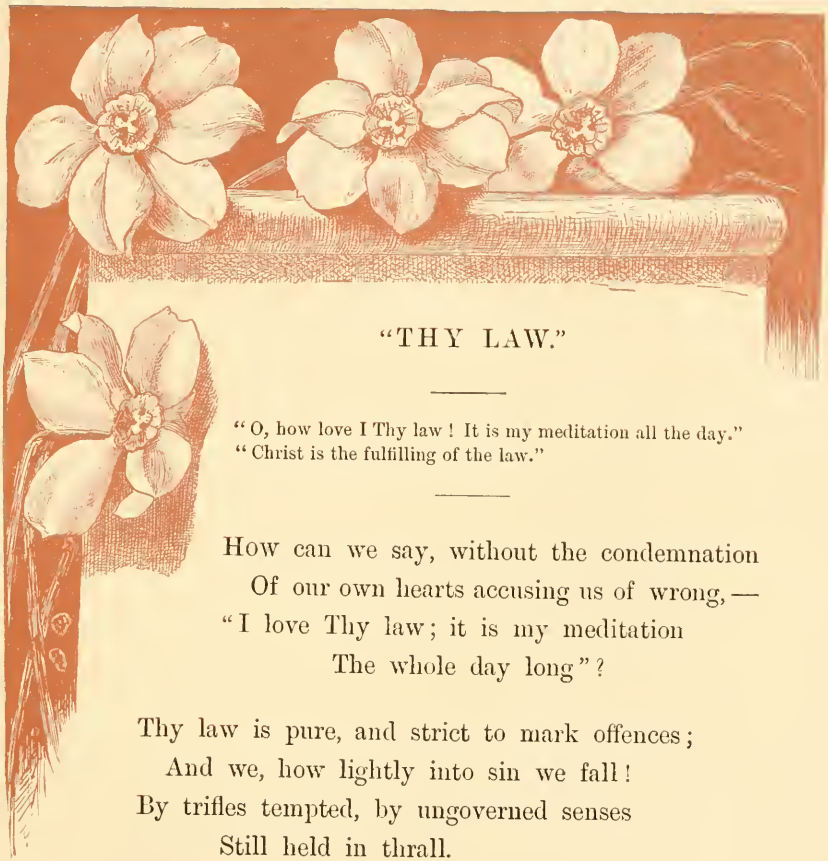
IN SILENCE.



No heart will break
With sorrow hidden for
love's sake:
The pain we bear
In silence, lest our dear ones share
Its anguish with a yearning vain
To comfort us, is blessed pain.

Eternal snows
Deepen around the Alpine rose;
But its sweet bloom
Makes no betrayal of the gloom
And bitter rigor of the land
Wherein its tender buds expand.

The patient heart
That bears its heavy cross apart,
And still makes known
Its burden unto Christ alone, —
To this one His sweet Spirit brings
Most dear and gracious comfortings.



"THY LAW."

"O, how love I Thy law! It is my meditation all the day."
"Christ is the fulfilling of the law."

How can we say, without the condemnation
Of our own hearts accusing us of wrong, —
"I love Thy law; it is my meditation
The whole day long"?

Thy law is pure, and strict to mark offences;
And we, how lightly into sin we fall!
By trifles tempted, by ungoverned senses
Still held in thrall.

The soul that sinneth — so Thy law declareth —
Shall surely die; and not a soul is born
But by inheritance of human nature shareth
The doom forlorn.

Stern law and sad for daily meditation!
Not David's love, I think, had long endured,
But for the vision of an expiation
At last secured.

With eyes anointed he beheld Thy coming,
O blessed Christ, and through the ages saw
The sinless One who, all our sins assuming,
Fulfilled the law.

Give to us now, who in these later ages
Have seen the shining of the sacred star;
And do possess the joy that seers and sages
Gazed at afar, —

Give to us, Lord, the fervent adoration
For love and justice so divinely blent,
That shall inspire our daily meditation
With deep content.

Not always, even with the satisfaction
Of its extreme requirement made by Thee,
Can our weak spirits meet the law's exaction
And penalty.

There is so much that baffles comprehension,
So many hours are darkened with strange pain;
And earnest effort fails of its intention,
And prayer seems vain.

Too often in the shadow of our sorrow
We murmur at the love that sorrow sends;
And question whether any fair to-morrow
Will make amends.

Our lives are full of cares and contradictions
That vex our souls, their need misunderstood;
And God, we cry, might spare us these afflictions
That yield no good.

O Holy One, whose life was not exempted
From any grief on human nature laid;
Be Thou our refuge when our souls are tempted
And sore dismayed.

Thou knowest all the foes that do torment us;
Convince us of Thy tender sympathy;
And of the grace that surely shall prevent us
Who trust in Thee.

So shall our hearts grow calm in faith and patience,
So shall our anxious prayers be turned to praise;
And Love Divine make sweet our meditations
Through all the days.



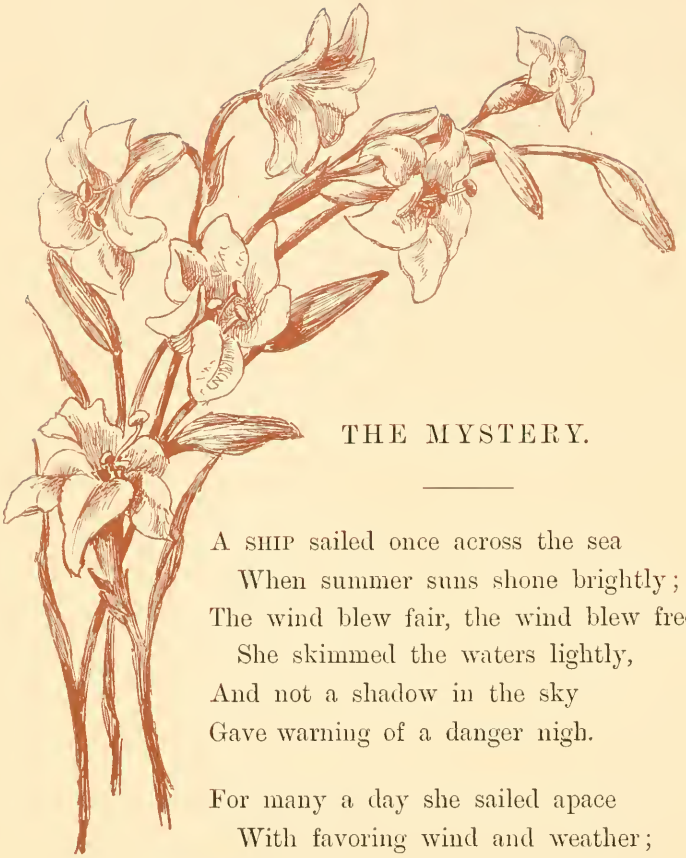
THE FIREFLY.

ALONE at dusk, her dull day's labor done,
Sat one whose hope was trembling on despair,
For whom the daylight and the dark were one
In equal dearth of brightness. Sitting where
A little strip of turf sun-baked, and bare
Of bloom or verdure, all her prospect was —
She saw a sudden glimmer in the grass,
And lo, a firefly's tiny taper there,
Twinkling as brightly the scant stubble through
As if in hedges dewy-sweet it flew.
Then in her soul a lofty shame was born
For vain repinings; and a patient grace,
Which, like the firefly in the barren place,
Shall haply shine through all her ways forlorn.



RECLAIMED.

SHE came, whose erring feet had gone astray,
Whose conscious heart was sore disquieted,
And trembling, saw in all its white array
The table of the Lord before her spread.
Then swift desire arose, and was outsped
By swifter memory, bringing blank dismay:
Abashed, despairing, she had turned away,
Nor drank the cup, nor tasted of the bread,
But that when all her fearful soul was stirred
With overwhelming sense of loss and pain,
The Master's voice that bade her stay, she heard;
And there was joy in Heaven once again:
For henceforth, with His pardon comforted,
She did but live to follow where He led.



THE MYSTERY.

A SHIP sailed once across the sea
 When summer suns shone brightly;
The wind blew fair, the wind blew free,
 She skimmed the waters lightly,
And not a shadow in the sky
Gave warning of a danger nigh.

For many a day she sailed apace
 With favoring wind and weather;
The Captain wore a smiling face,
 The seamen sang together;
And all grew gladder day by day,
Nor dreamed of peril in the way.

God's will is dark to human eyes,
And strange His visitations.
We see and hear in dumb surprise;
And men of all the nations
Have sought, but ever sought in vain,
His mighty reasons to explain.

One dies — we say it is God's will!
But why or where he goeth,
Or why another lingers still,
What living creature knoweth?
There is no voice from sea or land
That we can hear and understand.

And why the ship that braved the shock
Of billows in mid-ocean,
Should founder on a sunken rock,
Amid the sad commotion
Of shrieks and groans, and frantic prayer,
Tossed, fruitless, on the empty air, —

When, had He willed it, one day more
(One little night and morrow!)
Had brought them scathless to the shore,
And saved the wide-spread sorrow, —
What man can answer more than this,
That nought He does is done amiss?

We have to bow beneath His rod
 Who spares not for our crying;
"*Be still, and know that I am God,*"
 His sternly prompt replying.
Ah, God our Father, can it be
That this is *all* we hear from Thee?

Not so, for to our sore distress
 This tender message hastens:
He will not leave you comfortless,
 And whom He loves He chastens.
Whatever mortal woe betide,
With this we should be satisfied.

His ways are past our finding out;
 No passionate resistance,
No questioning, or angry doubt
 Can ever bridge the distance,
Or pierce the darkly woven screen
Our narrow thoughts and *His* between.

But whom He loves may well consent
 To bear His love's expression,
To wait His will and be content
 With holding in possession,
Though yet he may not use, the key
That shall unlock all mystery.

And whom He loves — O Christ, Thy death
 That wrought such expiation
Gave every soul with human breath
 The right to this relation!
Let us endure unto the end,
And some day we shall comprehend.



ANGELS' WINGS.

When summer days were warm, and sweet
With clover-bloom and ripening wheat,
We used to lie upon the grass
Within the flickering shadow spread
By leafy branches overhead,
And watch the bright clouds slowly pass.

They were so white against the blue,
With such a glory streaming through
Their silver fleeces, we were sure
They must, at least, be angels' wings;
And the mere fancy of such things
Kept childish speech and conduct pure.

We must not quarrel, when the skies,
For all we knew, were full of eyes
That watched to see if we were good;
And sometimes just the sight of one
White cloud illumined by the sun
Availed to check an angry mood.

Now we are women grown, and men,
That were but careless children then:
Wise with our realistic lore,
The shining mystery we explain —
Only a vapor born of rain! —
And dream of angels' wings no more.

But are we wiser, after all?
Haply the world-worn hearts recall,
With something like a thrill of dread,
What time the Master undefiled
"Set in their midst a little child" —
And what the words were that He said.

It might — we silently infer —
It might perhaps be easier
The kingdom of the Lord to win,
If still in far blue summer skies
We felt the watching angel eyes
That kept our childish hearts from sin.



RETURNING.

LORD, where Thy many mansions be,
Hast Thou a little room for me,
Whose restless feet these many days
Strange and forbidden paths have trod,
And wandering in uncertain ways,
Have missed the way that leads to God? —
Lord, is there any room for me
Who, sorrowing, would return to Thee?

Far have I strayed, still tossed about
On fears that would not be cast out,

For all the subtle theories
That men have formed, wherein to find
For troubled hearts a doubtful ease,
And freedom for a wilful mind:
Thy word, once hidden in my breast,
Too often robbed the night of rest.

I heard its still small voice above
All other voices, — not in love
As in the old sweet days of peace,
But with a tone of sad complaint:
"Why art thou swift to seek release
From easy yoke, and safe restraint?
False lights are these, and woe betide
The soul that takes them for its guide!"

Lord, if I heard, and in despite
Of warning chose the fair false light, —
If heedless, I Thy spirit grieved,
And slighted as an idle tale
Love such as no man hath conceived, —
What late repentance can avail?
How shall I dare to lift my face
Once more within Thy holy place?

I know not verily, and yet, —
With doubts perplexed, and fears beset,

And the sad heart unsatisfied, —
Lord, I remember what sweet rest
I did discover at Thy side:
With yearning not to be expressed
I long to walk once more with Thee —
Lord, hast Thou any room for me?



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